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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [EN](#) [RU](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN-ESTONIAN RELATIONS: INCHING TOWARD NORMALCY  
REF: TALLINN 520

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The MFA and Estonian Embassy suggest that Russia-Estonia relations are slowly returning to normal, despite lingering GOR ill will and unhelpful political rhetoric in both countries. Although no high-level visits are on the horizon, the two countries are closely coordinating on many practical economic, cultural and consular matters. GOR officials denied that "unofficial" sanctions were causing traffic problems on the border between Estonia and Russia, attributing them to routine summer maintenance work. End summary.

Emotions Aside, Practicality Prevails  
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¶2. (C) In a recent meeting, MFA Estonia Desk Director Yevgeniy Minakov conceded that Russia and Estonia were enjoying thriving working level contacts, while presenting the usual GOR charge-sheet against the Estonian leadership. Brandishing an official document "chronicling" problems allegedly instigated by the Estonian government, he blamed the state of relations on official Estonian rhetoric. The May 2005 border treaty, which was promptly ratified by Estonia in June 2005 but not Russia, was in limbo because the Estonian government was politicizing a "technical" process, according to Minakov, and would require a "change in Estonian tactics" to move forward.

¶3. (C) Minakov affirmed that transport of goods across the Estonian-Russian border remains a thorny issue but denied any politics were at the root of the recent delays. Citing equally long waits along the Latvian border, Minakov said summer maintenance work, not "unofficial" sanctions, was the culprit. Estonian Embassy DCM Anne Haermaste agreed with Minakov. She noted that there have been frequent delays along all of Russia's western border, including Latvia and Finland, this summer and in previous summers. Haermaste saw no connection between the controversy over the relocation of the Bronze Soldier and current Estonian border problems.

Too Tied to Be Estranged  
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¶4. (C) According to Haermaste, the two foreign ministers have met only twice since the May crisis, both times on the margins of international gatherings, and have no plans for a one-on-one meeting in the near future, including at UNGA. Haermaste blamed the Russian government's tendency to find a "small enemy" in order to unite the Russian population behind the government for domestic political reasons. According to Haermaste, tension in the bilateral relationship will not easily dissipate unless the two countries are able to acknowledge both the Soviet occupation of Estonia and Russia's contributions and sacrifices in ending the war. Equally guilty were the media in both countries, she said. Their penchant for inflammatory reporting was demonstrated in

the Baltic Sea pipeline coverage. Although the Estonian government is not against the pipeline, the Russian media have repeatedly reported the contrary. Estonia's only concern at this point is Gazprom's recently announced intention to involve the Russian Navy in the protection of the pipeline. Haermaste stressed that the permanent presence of the Russian Navy in the Baltic Sea would not be palatable to the Estonian leadership.

15. (C) Haermaste thought that the two countries are engaged in more active exchanges now than before May, as many citizens of both countries felt that the Bronze Soldier dispute misrepresented the good will and cultural ties that bind them. Lower level visits abound: Mayor of Tallinn Edgar Savisaar visited Moscow September 1-2 for Moscow City Day celebrations and DFM Maasikas will be meeting DFM Titov in Moscow the week of September 10. Intergovernmental commissions and the general agreement on economic cooperation are also reappearing on the bilateral agenda. Despite angry rhetoric, many Russians vacation in Estonia and that frequent complaints about the need for a visa are a small but real testament to a Russian fondness for Estonia, said Haermaste. Estonia's entry to the Schengen regime in 2008 will ease travel to Estonia for many Russians.

Comment

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16. (C) As is often the case here, populist efforts to unite Russians at the expense of a generally harmless external "enemy" masks long-standing cultural and interpersonal ties that may ultimately tell us more about the future of Moscow's relationship with Tallinn.  
Burns